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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1411
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RULSDMK/DOT WASHDC
RUEAHLCH/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHDC

UNCLAS NAIROBI 003100

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/RSA, AND AF/EPS
DEPT FOR SCT PHIPPS
DEPT ALSO PASS TO DOT FOR CONNIE HUNTER

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [PTER](#) [KCRM](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [KE](#)
SUBJECT: Kenya Will Allow Somalia Flights, But Via Wajir Only

REF: 2006 NAIROBI 4871

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Government of Kenya (GOK) announced that, effective August 1, it would end its suspension of flights to/from Somalia, but that all flights from Somalia must stop first at Wajir Airport for immigration, customs and security processing before proceeding to their final Kenyan destination. Outgoing flights, including those carrying miraa (or quat, a mild narcotic), may fly directly to Somalia from any place in Kenya, after clearance. Clearing incoming flights at Wajir could improve security, but it depends on the quality and reliability of the clearance process. End summary.

GOK Suspended Somalia Flights in November 2006

¶2. (U) Following the GOK's November 2006 decision to suspend direct scheduled flights from Somalia due to concerns about the potential threat from elements aligned with the Islamic Courts, the GOK faced strong pressure from politically well-connected miraa growers to resume cargo flights to Somalia. However, the cargo planes' use of Nairobi's Wilson airport was at odds with the Kenya Civil Aviation Administration's (KCAA) efforts to improve security at Wilson. The Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi, which is predominantly populated by "Somalia Somalis" rather than Kenyan ethnic Somalis, is located near Wilson Airport. The GOK therefore decided to process Somalia flights at another airport.

Where's Wajir?

¶3. (SBU) The GOK selected Wajir, a 2.8 kilometer long concrete airstrip on a military base in ethnic Somali-populated Northeastern Province, near the Somali border, with no terminal or air traffic control (ATC) facilities. In an unusually fast process, the GOK hired a contractor to build a terminal and assigned KCAA, Immigration, Customs, and security officers to work there. There is no computer terminal in Wajir for accessing the watch list, so the officers will have to rely on hard copy intelligence lists.

Wajir Scheduled to Open August 1

¶4. (U) On July 24, KCAA announced that Wajir Airport would open on August 1, and that all cargo and passenger flights coming from Somalia would be required to land at Wajir for security, immigration and customs clearance before proceeding to their final destinations in Kenya. Exceptions, presumably for international aid

organizations and the UN, must be authorized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The KCAA notice specified that cargo flights, including those carrying miraa (quat), may not carry passengers, and any flight carrying "unauthorized passengers" will be required to carry them back to Somalia. Passenger and cargo flights, including miraa, can fly directly to Somalia from any place in Kenya, once they are cleared.

15. (U) The KCAA notice also stated that airlines can use Wajir for all other domestic and foreign service. A new domestic carrier, Flight 540, plans to begin service to Wajir at some point in the future. However, the sparse population and the weak economy of the region limit the potential client base.

16. (SBU) Comment: The GOK has repeatedly postponed the Wajir opening date, and may do so again. Clearing flights from Somalia at Wajir could reduce the security risk at Nairobi's Wilson Airport. However, we have some concerns about the quality and reliability of Wajir's clearance process, plus the possibility of a malefactor taking advantage of the closeness to the border and the emptiness of the area to gain access to an aircraft cleared for Nairobi.

RANNEBERGER